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Research Reflection  
Calvert Award Submission

## BEHIND THE SCENES OF GRAPHIC DESIGN

In graphic design, every design element should serve a function. In order to create intentional design, the designer should first know their audience and how to best communicate with them. This project included researching the Shark Reef Aquarium official website in order to gather the logo and the text (or body copy), looking at aquarium visitor demographics and behavior, gathering more knowledge on the design program used (InDesign), and additional library resources.

Because it is difficult to cite sources for design projects, my initial issue was wondering how that applies to graphic design. The first campus resource I used was the Office of Undergraduate Research. I met with a staff member who suggested different ways in which I might begin conducting research. That staff member helped me to see a different perspective - graphic design is not only one's own reasoning. It has its part; however, applying resources can create a better impact on design. After that conversation, I refined topics to research into the following categories: aquarium visitor demographics, visitor behavior, prior knowledge, and interest. The articles I read stated that visitors were families – suggesting that the design must appeal to all ages. A booklet filled with cartoon pictures would attract mostly kids. On the other hand, a booklet with few pictures would not appeal to younger ages. Secondly, I learned that audiences are attracted to the idea of touching animals. This is why “Animal Encounters” and “Exhibits” are in the booklet. Thirdly, I learned that people better connect with aquarium exhibits if recognizable animals are on display. This is why the cutout pictures

throughout the booklet are recognizable animals that the public wants to see. Thanks to outside sources such as the Association of Zoos and Aquariums website, I was able to find this information and constructed the booklet to answer the following questions in this order: “What is the Shark Reef Aquarium? How does it stand out from other aquariums? Is it environmentally friendly? Is it educational? What is there to see? Can I interact with any animals? Where can I go to see them?”.

Library resources also played an important role. Using the Academic Search Premier database was a simple way to find credible sources and academic journals. The book stacks on 4<sup>th</sup> floor of Lied Library contain a large collection of books regarding graphic design. This is where I found general information on how to better visually communicate design.

Other research included looking at the competition’s designs and thinking of the following questions: “What information are other places including? Why are their designs working or not working? How can the Shark Reef Aquarium’s booklet stand out from others?”. Lastly, graphic designers must think on their own. A portion of my design came from personal critical thinking, included questions such as “Is the text easily readable? Do the pictures make sense - for example, am I using pictures of animals that are actually located there? Does the design easily guide the reader’s eyes to the next page?”

It was hard to gather visitor information exclusively about aquariums. Instead, I broadened my search to include information about zoos. I also broadened my research in order to design a graphic that is effective and memorable to viewers. The scenario of the project was this: Guests are indecisive about going inside the Shark Reef Aquarium. They

pick up this booklet in the front area that provides information about the place. Can this booklet sell them on the idea of spending money to visit?

Several keywords were used during this process. Basic ones were “aquarium”, “demographics”, and/or “design”. Those keywords were not bringing up information to my needs. Using synonyms was helpful, using other words such as “aquariums and zoos”, “advertising”, “media”, or “public relations”. When the wording was more precise, it was easier to filter through which articles/academic journals would provide the most valuable information.

Another interesting way of researching for this project was being able to better understand the design program I used – InDesign. It is incredible how much of a difference that clean, good-looking design is affected by no knowledge of the design program. The website Lynda.com has been a great aid to me, as I had not used InDesign until this spring semester.

Although it is difficult to do traditional library research, it is still possible to look up valuable articles, alternative designs, and information about the company the project is for. These are the ways in which I have constructed my research and can use these methods to better my future designs.

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